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111729Z Mar 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001340

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/11/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: EU FURIOUS OVER GOT HANDLING OF POLICE VIOLENCE

REF: A. ISTANBUL 383

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1074

[1](#)C. ANKARA 1231

Classified By: Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ankara-based EU diplomats say EU leaders are furious over the GOT's continued poor handling of the violent March 6 police crackdown on International Women's Day demonstrators in Istanbul. FM Gul promised an investigation; however PM Erdogan, Justice Minister Cicek, and other GOT leaders have undermined the integrity of the investigation by repeatedly asserting that the demonstration was unauthorized, that police were provoked, and that Turkey is being unfairly criticized. GOT officials have not returned calls from EU leaders on the issue. European contacts say the EU will insist on a thorough investigation. They also told us the GOT's obtuse response has seriously damaged Turkey's image, and called into question the sincerity of GOT reforms. End Summary.

Under EU Prodding, Investigation Promised

[1](#)2. (U) Ankara-based EU contacts say EU officials are furious over the GOT's continued obtuse, politically tone-deaf handling of the fallout from the violent March 6 crackdown by Istanbul police of International Women's Day demonstrators (reftel A). European diplomats told us Luxembourgian FM Asselborn, who arrived in Ankara March 6 as a member of the visiting EU Troika, wanted to cancel the planned GOT-Troika meetings in protest when the GOT failed to address the violence. Asselborn raised the issue March 7 with FM Gul, who promptly issued a statement promising to investigate the incident. Gul also told Troika officials that he had discussed the matter with Minister Cicek, who agreed to investigate thoroughly and punish police if they are found culpable.

PM, Other Leaders Defensive

[1](#)3. (U) Troika officials were satisfied with Gul's comments, though disappointed they were made only after the Troika insisted. However, Gul's promise of an investigation has been buried in an avalanche of defensive and squalid statements from a range of GOT officials, including PM Erdogan, Cicek, and Istanbul Governor Guler. Instead of emphasizing their dismay over the brutal police actions and promising to punish those responsible, the officials have repeatedly asserted that the demonstration was unauthorized and that police were "provoked." They have also complained that similar incidents occur in other countries and that Turkey is being unfairly criticized. Cicek sarcastically quipped that when police in EU countries confront demonstrators, "they do not greet them with flowers." Erdogan responded to reporters' questions on the incident by saying "freedom has limits." The tone had not changed as of March 11, when Erdogan for the second day in a row publicly accused the Turkish media of provoking the controversy by covering the incident, and asked why Turkish reporters did not also cover "similar events" in other countries.

EU To Press for Punishment

[1](#)4. (C) To make matters worse, our contacts say GOT officials throughout the week failed to return phone calls from Asselborn and other EU leaders on the issue. The Dutch Embassy spent all day March 8 trying to put Dutch Ambassador Gosses in touch with Gul. The MFA called back at 10 p.m., only to offer a March 9 meeting with MFA Deputy U/S Bozkir. When the two met, Bozkir gave weak responses when Gosses urged the GOT to condemn the police violence and ensure a proper investigation. A contact from the Dutch Embassy (representing EU term president Luxembourg in Ankara) said Asselborn was "about to explode" over the GOT's handling of

the issue. The diplomats say the EU is determined to ensure the GOT conducts a thorough investigation, and that it metes out appropriate punishments.

MFA Official Concedes Incident Mishandled

15. (C) We raised the Istanbul incident, and the GOT's poor response, with Ali Kemal Aydin, department head at the MFA Deputy Directorate General for EU Affairs. Aydin said he and his colleagues were "disgusted" with the police actions, which, he asserted, violated "our cultural values." He conceded that the GOT has mishandled the matter, and said the MFA has unsuccessfully lobbied for a more forthright approach. MFA officials were in meetings with the Troika when the violence occurred. Later the same day, as soon as they saw the press coverage, they urged Gul to respond. Gul immediately contacted Governor Guler's office, but Guler did not reply until the following day. "Looking back, we should have insisted that Gul make a statement the same day, even without speaking to Guler," he said.

16. (C) Aydin added that Turkish leaders traditionally respond defensively to criticism, an "unfortunate" approach he claims MFA officials have long advised against. While it is true that police in other countries commit similar abuses, he continued, the GOT has to accept that Turkey will draw more criticism because of its "poor track record" on human rights. Aydin said he had no information on the investigation, but stressed that police must be held to the standards set in the latest laws and regulations intended to curb abuses.

Diplomats: Turkey's Image Seriously Damaged

17. (C) EU diplomats noted that some European MPs have called for a postponement of the planned October start of Turkey's accession talks. While our contacts consider such a move highly unlikely, they say the Istanbul violence overshadowed the substance of the Troika visit and seriously damaged Turkey's standing in Europe. A German diplomat averred that the incident is the latest in a series of recent GOT moves that have undermined Turkey's candidacy. Since the December Summit, he said, the GOT has failed to prepare for accession talks (reftel B), and Gul publicly demeaned Ambassador Kretschmer, head of the European Commission Representation to Turkey, after Kretschmer called attention to the lack of progress (reftel C). Our German colleague said the media images of police beating women were "the worst thing that could have happened for Turkey," because many Europeans consider women's rights the key test of the sincerity of Turkish reforms.

18. (C) Martin Dawson, head of the Political Section at the European Commission Representation, said Erdogan's performance during the Troika visit indicates that he has "no genuine interest in human rights." Not only has Erdogan failed to handle the police violence properly, but he also failed to present the Troika with any plan for further EU reforms (septel). "This is not a guy who stays awake at night thinking about how to improve human rights in Turkey," Dawson declared. "It does not occupy his mind."

Comment

19. (C) The images of police officers kicking women in the face and beating them repeatedly with nightsticks bluntly illustrated the gap between amending authoritarian laws and transforming authoritarian mentalities. GOT leaders passed up the opportunity to use the incident to demonstrate that the days of Turkish police impunity are over. Their actions instead reveal that Turkey is still a country where the State is protected from the individual, not the other way around. Moreover, the GOT leadership's defensive response further highlights the aimlessness and anti-foreign attitude the government has displayed since December.

110. (C) While it is true that similar incidents occur in other countries, it is difficult to believe the GOT will conduct an honest investigation when Erdogan, Cicek and others have all but declared the police innocent. According to one press report, investigators examining videotape of the events have determined that eight officers used disproportionate force, but they cannot be identified because they were wearing gas masks. We will discuss the investigation with officials in the Ministry of Justice.